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AUTHOR Reglin, Gary; Chisom, Marilyn
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ABSTRACT

A study was done of 5 selected domains of self-perception held by 60 urban black male 10th graders in North Carolina. The domains were scholastic competence, athletic competence, physical appearance, behavioral conduct, and job competence. Each domain was transformed into a research questions. Achievers (n=30) and potential achievers (n=30) as measured by the California Achievement Test (CAT) were compared on each question. Achievers had scored above the 50th percentile on the CAT and the potential achievers had scored below the 50th percentile. The research design was causal-comparative, with the independent variable being achievement. The findings reveal statistically significant differences for scholastic competence, job competence, and behavioral competence. The mean scores of the achievers on these three domains were greater than those of the potential achievers. Surprisingly, there were statistically significant differences on athletic competence and physical appearance, with the potential achievers having the greatest mean scores. The potential achievers' perceptions of athletic ability and competence at sports were greater than the achievers'. They perceived themselves to be very good at sports and athletic activities and to be more "good-looking." The potential achievers were certain of a successful career as an athlete or entertainer. Classroom instructional ramifications are provided for educators with national implications for the education of urban African American males who are potential achievers. Included are 5 tables and 20 references. (JB)

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Self-Perception and Achievement of 10th Grade Urban African American Males: Classroom Instructional Implications

by Dr. Gary Reglin, Assistant Professor of Curriculum and Instruction and Marilyn Chisom, Graduate Student in the College of Education

Phone Number: 704-547-4500

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University of North Carolina at Charlotte
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
Charlotte, North Carolina 28223

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This is a Revised Version of a paper that was Presented at the 1992 North Carolina Association for Research in Education (NCARE) Conference at Chapel Hill, North Carolina

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore five selected domains of self-perception held by Black urban 10th grade male students. The domains were scholastic competence, athletic competence, physical appearance, behavioral conduct, and job competence. Each domain was transformed to be a research question. Achievers (mean = 63.5 and standard deviation = 11.10 on the California Achievement Test) and potential achievers (mean = 39.06 and standard deviation = 7.35) were compared on each question. The research design was causal-comparative. The independent variable was achievement (achievers and potential achievers). The dependent variable was Harter's self-perception scores. The two groups were very similar except on the independent variable. The findings revealed statistically significant differences for scholastic competence, job competence, and behavioral competence. The mean scores of the achievers on these 3 domains were greater than the potential achievers. Surprisingly, there were statistically significant differences on athletic competence and physical appearance with the potential achievers having the greatest mean scores. Classroom instructional ramifications are provided for educators with national implications for the education of urban African American males who are potential achievers.

Introduction

A key question in the American Association of School Administrators survey on students at-risk asked, "What characteristic is most often identified in students inevitably bound for failure?" One-fourth of the administrators responding had a clear answer: "Poor self-image." The respondents also described this characteristic as "low self-esteem," "low self-concept," and "possessing negative attitudes toward self" (Brodinsky and Keough, 1989).

A Vancouver, Washington study found: "Bad feelings about one's self impact negatively on the learning ability of adolescents. African American adolescents who think they are dumb, stupid, or useless tend to give up; they demonstrate feelings of "I can't" and "It's too hard". Such a state of mind does not allow for learning. Fear of failure, of ridicule, of looking bad to others is a dominant blockage of many African American males who are potential achievers.

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The purpose of this study was to explore five selected domains of self-perception held by Black urban 10th grade male students. They were scholastic competence, athletic competence, physical appearance, behavioral conduct, and job competence. The domains were selected by school counselors. By examining the domains, it was anticipated that information would emerge that would offer some insight into the nature of these students that would better assist them in taking charge of their lives. It was additionally anticipated that this information would hold useful instructional implications for improvement of the education of Black urban male students nationally. Exploring the aforementioned domains of self-perception during the critical grade of 10th grade should offer insight and yield possible solutions to the problem of subpar achievement of a significant number of African American male students.

Intially, it is very important that concepts such as "self-esteem", "self-concept" and "perceived competence" are clearly understood by educators. These concepts have become central to formulations emerging from social learning theory (Bandura 1977), self-perception theory (Bem, 1972), social cognition (Lepper and Greene, 1978), and theories of competence and intrinsic motivation (Harter, 1981). At a more applied level, the enhancement of an individual's self-perception is critical to educators. Teachers intuitively know that when warm and supportive learning milieus are established to make minority students feel better about themselves, they do better in school.

The simple fact is that many African American male youngsters today are not receiving enough positive nurturing attention from either at home or at school. The reasons are numerous and complex but the result is that more and more adolescents have low levels of self-esteem (Canfield, 1990).

Self-concept may be defined as a person's totai appraisal of his/her appearance, background and origins, abilities and resources, attitudes and feelings which culminates as a directing force in his/her behavior (LaBenne and Greene, 1969). The African American male 10th grader perceptions are formed through his experience with interpretation of his environment. They are influenced especially by reinforcements, evaluations by significant others, and his attribution for his behavior. His self-concept, therefore develops and is affected by cultural influence and feedback which he receives over the years from others who reveal their perceptions to him. It is important to remember that self-concepts with its many dimensions are not unalterably fixed, but rather are modified by every life experience through at least the maturing years.

Examining changes in self-concept with regard to educational environments will allow educators to create learning situations which will enhance the development of higher academic self-concept in African American adolescents. Students who perceive that their lives are satisfying and that they are competent should do well in the school milieu.

Studies have indicated some similarities and differences in self-concept across various backgrounds (Marchant, 1991). Jenson, White, and Galliher (1982) found that Blacks did not suffer from extremely poor self-concepts. Martinez and Dukes (1987) found that minorities tended to have lower levels of self-esteem than Whites on public (intelligence) aspect of self-esteem, but higher levels for private satisfaction with self.

Madhere (1991) revealed an interesting point of discussion when he indicated that "the question may still be raised regarding how to reconcile the positive findings on self-esteem with other contradictory findings such as those on locus of control". Specifically, how is it possible that young African Americans consistently register above-average levels of self-esteem while reporting below-average levels of internality on locus of control measure (Eagle, Fitzgerald, Gifford and Zuma, 1988). Evidence is mounting that the majority of African American male adolescents do manage, despite some serious hardships both in and outside school, to maintain a strong and balanced measure of confidence that shields them from self-pity. According to Madhere (1988), a number of educators have persisted over the years in characterizing African American males as culturally deprived, educationally disadvantaged, learning disabled, and (the term in vogue nowadays) "at-risk". Such defeatist models in the affective domain are an outgrowth of the equally infamous deficit models employed in the cognitive domain. The defeatist models certainly negatively impact the self-perception of African American male adolescents.

Based on interviews with high school counselors, the 10th grade is characterized with many concerns such as structural changes in the family, academic alienation, an increasing emphasis on devoting time to athletics rather than academics, much attention on "looking good" through the acquisition of expensive clothes and shoes, receiving a disproportionately amount of classroom punishment, and many times an excessive number of hours working on a job instead of on academic studies. The five domains for this study were specifically selected to address the aforementioned concerns. Answers were sought to five research questions. Each question was tested at the ".05" level of significance. They are:

1. Is there a significant difference between the Scholastic Competence scores on the self-perception instrument of the urban minority male 10th graders in the lower 50 percentile on the CAT versus the urban minority male 10th graders in the upper 50 percentile on the CAT?

2. Is there a significant difference between the Athletic Competence scores on the self-perception instrument of the urban minority male 10th graders in the lower 50 percentile on the CAT versus the urban minority male 10th graders in the upper 50 percentile on the CAT?

3. Is there a significant difference between the Physical Appearance scores on the self-perception instrument of the urban minority male 10th graders in the lower 50 percentile on the CAT versus the urban minority male 10th graders in the upper 50 percentile on the CAT?

4. Is there a significant difference between the Job Competence scores on the self-perception instrument of the urban minority male 10th graders in the lower 50 percentile on the CAT versus the urban minority male 10th graders in the upper 50 percentile on the CAT?

5. Is there a significant difference between the Behavioral Conduct scores on the self-perception instrument of the urban minority male 10th graders in the lower 50 percentile on the CAT versus the urban minority male 10th graders in the upper 50 percentile on the CAT?

Conceptual Framework

Expectations of key persons in the learning milieu of African American male students affect their self-perception. The conceptual framework for this study revolves around the self-fulfilling prophecy effect wherein an originally erroneous expectation leads to behavior that causes the expectation to become true. Many African American males receive myriad messages from diverse sources such as the media, community, and teachers informing them that they are not suppose to succeed in academics. The messages negatively impact these students' self-perception. These messages are so pervasive and profoundly ingrained in the students until students begin to believe that high scholastic performance is not for them and they start exhibiting behaviors reflective of low scholastic performance. Self-fulfilling prophecy effects are very powerful because they induce a significant change in student behavior. As educators, our low expectations for academic excellence in many African American male students cause us to treat them in ways that make them respond just as we expected they would.

Once formed, expectations tend to be self-perpetuating for students as well as educators because expectations guide both perceptions and behavior. When we expect to find something, we are much more likely to see it than when we are not looking for it.

This is part of the reason why teachers often fail to notice the strengths of African American male students who are frequent discipline problems in the classroom. When expecting misbehaviors, teachers may miss many of these students' accomplishments or positive contributions that someone else might have notice and reinforced. Expectations not only cause teachers to notice some things and fail to notice others, but they also affect the way teachers interpret what they do notice. Teachers should adopt appropriate general expectations about teaching and should learn to recognize their specific attitudes and expectations about individual students and to monitor the treatment of individual students. Teaching expectations and attitudes can be allies and tools if properly maintained and used. Additionally, erroneous expectations about the achievement and conduct of potential achievers can weaken perception of self in the five domains under investigation in this study.

Subjects

The source group consisted of 60 urban African American male 10th graders in North Carolina. Thirty of the students scored below the 50 percentile on the California Achievement Test (CAT) (mean = 39.06, standard deviation = 7.35). This group was named potential achievers. Thirty additional students were employed in the study that scored above the 50 percentile (mean = 63.5, standard deviation = 11.10).

This group was named achievers. It was the decision of this researcher and the high school counselors to use the CAT scores in this study because of the unavailability of grades. In a subsequent follow-up study at the end of the school year CAT scores and grades in selected courses will be employed. The 30 achievers were selected from students who had permission to participate in the survey and who scored above the 50 percentile on the CAT. According to the high school counselors, the 30 achievers generally were students with "B" averages.

Instrumentation

Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents

The Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (Harter, 1985) was administered to the subjects as a whole group in the classes. The instrument taps perceptions of scholastic competence, athletic competence, physical appearance, social acceptance, and behavioral conduct, five specific domains, as well as global self-worth. The rationale and supportive evidence favoring such a domain-specific approach has been spelled out in detail in previous writings (Harter 1985, 1986, 1989). Adolescents clearly discriminate among the domains in the instrument, reporting different levels of adequacy depending upon the domain. The internal consistency for the subscales are presented below.

	Scholastic	Athletic	Appearance	Conduct	Job
Sample	.91	.90	.89	None	.93

California Achievement Test (CAT)

The CAT has been a well respected test for over 50 years. Its purpose is to measure achievement in the basic skills commonly found in state and district curricula. The CAT utilizes multiple-choice items at all levels. Intercorrelations among the subtests of the CAT are relatively high, in the .5 to .8 range. Further the correlation between total scale score on the CAT Form E and total scale score on the Test of Cognitive Skills ranges from .6 at Level 13 to .8 at Level 16.

The within-level Kuder Richardson 20 internal consistency reliabilities for the subtests and total test score generally are high. 6s and .7s. The internal consistency reliabilities are typically in the high .8s and .9s. Stability reliabilities for tests in levels 10, 11, and 12 of the CAT are in the .8 to .95 range. Overall, the stability, equivalence, and internal consistency of the test scores are high.

Procedures

The research design was causal-comparative. The independent variable was CAT scores (upper and lower 50 percentile). Students were divided into two groups on the independent variable. The two groups were potential achievers and achievers. The dependent variable was the self-perception scores for the five domains. T-tests were used to examine each of the five domains.

The group of achievers were selected to be as similar as possible to the potential achievers. The major difference between the two groups was the independent variable. Permission was obtained and this researcher and a graduate student administered the surveys. The assistant principal of instruction gave each student his/her CAT score to write it on the surveys. Surveys were collected and scored using Harter's scoring instrument. Means were computed for all domains. Data were analyzed using SPSSX on the VAX/VMS. T-Tests, means and standard deviations were computed for the five research questions.

Results

For research question number one there was a statistically significant difference ($t = -6.13$, $p = .017$). The achievers Scholastic Competence scores were significantly greater than the potential achievers scores. Data for question number one are presented in table 1.

See Table 1

For research question number two there was a statistically significant difference ($t = 5.67$, $p = .006$). The potential achievers Athletic Competence scores were significantly greater than the achievers scores.

See Table 2

For research question number three there was a statistically significant difference ($t = .98$, $p = .018$). The potential achievers Physical Appearance scores were significantly greater than the achievers scores.

See Table 3

For research question number four there was a statistically significant difference ($t = -4.17$, $p = .007$). The achievers Job Competence scores were significantly greater than the potential achievers scores.

See Table 4

For research question number five there was a statistically significant difference ($t = -3.78$, $p = .011$). The achievers Behavioral Competence scores were significantly greater than the potential achievers scores.

See Table 5

Discussion

The findings for research question number one were expected and are consistent with the majority of literature. The achievers possessed a perception of greater competence or ability within the realm of scholastic performance. The achievers felt better about their performance doing classwork. However, the responses to questions 2 and 3 were surprising.

The potential achievers perceptions of athletic ability and competence at sports were greater than the achievers. They perceived themselves to be very good at sports and athletic activities. They perceived themselves to be more "good-looking". According to the counselors, many of the potential achievers devoted a tremendous amount of time to recreational sports such as basketball and football instead of academic endeavors such as homework and test/quiz preparation. These students identified much more with athletes such as Magic Johnson or Michael Jordan and entertainers such as M.C. Hammer. Potential achievers were certain of a successful career as an athlete or entertainer.

In the media, many African American adolescents see far more athletes and entertainers of their own race than then they see African American doctors, lawyers, teachers, or scientists. Unlike White children who see myriad and diverse potential positive role models in the media, many African American children tend to model themselves after or admire the African American athlete or entertainer who are the prevalent and positive success figures they are exposed to regularly (Edwards, 1983). According to Anderson (1990) and Reglin and Adams (1990), Edward's thesis is very similar to Arthur Ashe, the former tennis star who is now speaking out about the negative effect of sports participation on African American youth. Their main argument is that unrealistic athletic expectations usually hurt the young African American male's future chances of success.

Ashe claims that once the children begin to think irrationally they limit their futures; their outlook is altered to such an extent that if they do not succeed in sports, they have no other options. As a result, they neglect their academic pursuits and many end up with neither a sufficient education nor a future.

It is important for the curriculum to emphasize to the potential achievers that there are 35 million African-Americans but only 1200 Black professional athletes in the United States. There are 12 times more Black lawyers than Black athletes, 3 times more Black dentists than Black athletes, and 15 times more Black doctors than Black athletes. Their chances of matching the achievements of General Colin Powell or Governor Wilder are greater than matching the achievements of Magic Johnson or Michael Jordan. Educators must teach the students that there are better avenues of opportunity than sports.

The potential achievers high perception of being "good-looking" can be employed as a powerful positive reinforcement tool for the classroom teacher, counselor and school administrator. Instead of focusing on negative behaviors and constantly providing the students with signals indicating academic inadequacy, educators can endeavor to enhance good social-relationships with the students by providing specific praise about the physical appearance of the students. Comments in public as the students are entering the classroom will make the students feel good about themselves in front of their peers.

Praise should also be given in private and in the close vicinity of teachers and parents. This would help to establish a warm and supportive classroom environment for the potential achievers that will lead to better scholastic performance.

The data for questions 4 and 5 indicate that achievers perceive themselves to be more capable of doing better at a part-time job. They are also quicker to avoid getting into trouble and feel better about the way they behave. This was expected and is consistent with the majority of literature. According to the counselors, the achievers place a higher value on academic achievement. They perceive that they have good academic skills that will serve them well in the job market. The achievers realize that there is a high positive correlation between avoiding getting in trouble and academic achievement.

In summary, in order to augment achievement of potential achievers, educators throughout the nation must adopt and implement the high standards and high expectations motto in the Atlanta Public Schools. That is: "Turn up the heat." The heat must be turned up on everybody (Harris, 1990). Everyone in the learning environment of potential achievers must be sensitive to the needs of potential achievers and held to high standards of accountability (Reglin, 1990). Atlanta is turning up the heat on teachers to see that they do more stand-up, active teaching, and that they give students more homework and expect them to do it.

They are asking everybody to do more. Schools are slowly digressing from strategies detrimental to the achievement and self-perception of African American males such as ability grouping, tracking, and excessively classifying African American males in special education classes such as behaviorally handicapped, emotionally handicapped, mildly handicapped and scores of additional labels.

The labeling and negative stigma profoundly affect the self-perception of students. Once classified, the negative stigma associated with the label follows them throughout life. The labeling is a tremendous source of embarrassment for the students because of peer pressure. Peers "tease" and isolate the students. Self-perception becomes damaged for life. Teachers are being motivated and in some cases coerced into becoming familiar with alternative research based strategies that are effective in enhancing the motivation and achievement of potential achievers such as cooperative learning strategies, learning styles instruction, planning for individual differences, planning a variety of instructional strategies during a typical class period, peer tutoring, cross-age tutoring and making use of technology in the classroom similar to computers, video-cassette recorders, and camcorders.

The heat is also being turned up on superintendents and principals. Students and educators are being held to high standards of accountability. As educators, we know that all students can become achievers.

The high standards and expectations for all personnel in the learning environment of the potential achieving African American male students will improve their self-perception over the five domains and greatly enhance their transformation to "achievers".

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TABLE 1

Means and Standard Deviations for Scholastic Competence Scores

Group	n	M	SD
Potential Achievers	30	2.68	.46
Achievers	30	3.29	.29

TABLE 2

Means and Standard Deviations for Athletic Competence Scores

Group	n	M	SD
Potential Achievers	30	3.31	.31
Achievers	30	2.69	.52

TABLE 3

Means and Standard Deviations for Physical Appearance Scores

Group	n	M	SD
Potential Achievers	30	3.07	.47
Achievers	30	2.92	.72

TABLE 4

Means and Stand Deviations for Job Competence Scores

Group	n	M	SD
Potential Achievers	30	2.44	.68
Achievers	30	3.11	.40

TABLE 5

Means and Standard Deviations for Behavioral Competence Scores

Group	n	M	SD
Potential Achievers	30	2.57	.68
Achievers	30	3.12	.41